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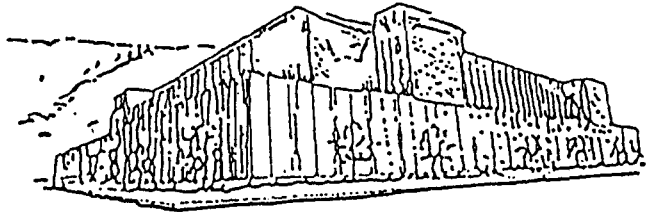
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1001 Beauty Secrets


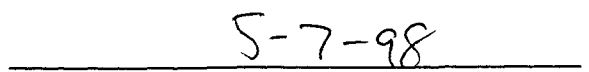
by

Gerri Jardine

B.A. University of Montana, 1995

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
University of Montana
1998

Approved by:


Chair, Board of Examiners
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1001 BEAUTY SECRETS

by

Gerri Jardine

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“Rafting” in *the Marlboro Review*

“Relocation” in *Teacup*

“Reno to Wendover” in *CutBank 41*

My sincerest thanks to the former staff of the *Missoula Independent* for their support and encouragement, and to Steve Murray for his directorial transformation of “Want” in the poetry musicale, *Heart Murmurs*.

I. O the Blue

Whatever you do, crush superstition and love those who love you.

--Voltaire

Sandcastle

--for Sam

You weave one arm and one leg into
my arm and leg. Standing, we call
this position *the gull*,
reclining, *the flounder*.

Where fluke mouth kisses, I mimic
small mistakes, startle skeeters, boots dragging
with crabs. You play the stickbird
at the shelf. The frail radio
is tuned to weather.

And we resist rescue with a gesture, unpinning
our scarves in the wind.

*

In an envelope postmarked "Tybee,"
a tide table and three scales
of a bottomfish.

At dusk, where the cape folds in, I release moths
by the fistful. Flood tide turns a sandcastle
into a dull knuckle.

Up Here in the Bones

An island came between us,
a flock of crisp gulls, the shore swinging
in shadow.

It's the future Do you want another?

We swam tunnels full
of heavy brine, bumped our heads,
knees glancing off walls covered
in subway tiles. Blue
light grew bluer.

But that was a dream, you say A dream

We washed out - water streaked
by an uneven wind into a sea
we could not see the sides of.

*Tell me, what is the difference in the horse
beneath you at a canter or gallop? Salt knees pump
Hooves mark the sand What?*

I hoisted my legs over the slim side
of a boat filled to the gunwales
with topsoil, a handbell choir
clanging the spar.

*Call it a block, a winch, an eight-hour clock
Call it too much to ask up here in the bones
of one animal*

(no stanza break)

Who said, “upended artifacts, carefully placed?”

This leg is of the body

This one is earth

We collapse backward, slack

arms phosphorescent.

Sound of kisses, probably mine,

in the breaking sea breaking

over.

O the Blue Eye, O the Blue Sea

Black mirrors of coffee spin. A din
of silverware recedes to a dink in the green
seascape, sea-foam, static. Cornered,
the waiter, thin as a sigh, refuses
eye contact, his crisp cuffs adroop though
she stares at the door, folds a boat
of the white napkin.

*What if the door swung out and she sat in the boat,
if the boat swung at anchor, rode free, if, on a Tuesday,
from the boatswain's chair, her body, so like a full bowl,
appeared half-empty, through the binoculars
and landfog, through the spyglass, otherwise?*

Glassware cradles pinks from the upscale
dusk over Stonington: the waiter's blush a winespread
in linen, her eyes to the door. Every woman
in the room folds a boat from a napkin; in here
it all bobs and sloshes (not the seascape
overhead), the eyelash awash in a blue saucer;
and the fleet goes on and on.

Rafting

1.

You hold the usual rock, the twig, the blade
of an oar to my lips. I kiss each one and keep
the pose. Knee deep, I count only the stones
out of round.

2.

I gesture from the bridge in a pointless blue
dress, my stockings a mess in the trumpet vines.
I pull my clothes off over my head and drop
my glasses.

Two miles south, a red wig hangs up on a bell
buoy and splays in the ebb tide. I have cut
my nails too short again. I still see the white part
of your hair as you kneel
in the marsh to lick the dried blood
from my fingers, the green eyes that startle
the heron, and that crooked tooth gating
the charted rivers. The grate of the red wing
splits grasses to the quick. Even if you don't come
back I'll feel
a little less naked, a little less like a man
in woman's clothing, a little less similar.

3.

I save a piece of the keel to roll
into a crescent along
with the scabs from my knees.
Then you call.

(no stanza break)

I pedal faster. Still more moths
alight on my stationary bike. I clean
their crisp bodies from the overhead lamps. I am
practicing

4.
reaching across the table to touch your face:

5.
Like this:
I have hired a boy who is learning
to play the harp. I have toughened my fingertips
with sandpaper. Come home. The walls lack
without our clank.

I am not the face so close to you you
cannot focus, nor the blue dress that threads the bar.
I am the small figure in the distance
rafting west.

Rock to Rudder

Waist deep in the harbor I show you my scars
so many times you recite them to passersby
from memory.

From here we hear
the lighthouse lean into a barrel wave,
a stout hold murmur, paralleled
by landfog, the voice less than an "m,"
the voice a soft mattress
in a dim room, farther still
than your voice
when I have turned
the record over. When I have turned
the record over you face away
from the wall
and make a sound
like a schooner touching shoal,
the groan
of rock to rudder,
the sound that I will make
in the urge
of undertow.

Rumors

I awake holding position 8,
torch aloft to burn my pages.
The sketches of buildings: a twisted
turret or a greened copper spire
whirled in birds
upset by the rumor
of a wildfire that burnt
out.

I burn and burn and there are always more;
the scrawls that scud ahead of a wind
sharp as barnacles. I cannot remember
not doing this, writing, "I am sorry,"
across everything in my rooms in 3 languages.
One I understand. Two are for the people
I believe my parents and my lovers are.
I know no language for what I am.

I fish the answering machine from the cove:
the thick pauses, breath caught
on tape. All mine.
Do the razor clams raking
the blue needle grasses
hold the posed
question:
Is it because I forget
to release the crowded
starlings nested in my lips,
my legs, at the instant
of the idea of fire, of no fire, of no idea?

Landfog

Into the thumbs of dawn, into the lather,
in the furred tongues of sleeping children,
moths light the horsecart of morning.

In the picked over apple grove, in the shelf
of the harbor, in the wharf gallows,
in the wet mouth of Groton, the hollow
bones of sea ducks hold water. In the boathouse,
in the wrung ear of the woodcarver,
a figurehead whispers, "touch the grass."

Into the swamp, the ocean vigil steers a slim
canoe. Into the limp grass, the repeated
vigil twists waxed fingers. In clumps,
Queen kelp knots up over the shoal,
a throw rug on the face of the estuary.
Into the mouths of tautog, a surge of flux.

In a rack of song in a grating hull
in a gust of spume at Race Point,
scuds a pocketful of lapstrakes and apples
and a samson post released from timber.
In the cove (in a cockel in an ear)
in a skiff in tow, instinct turns a ruddy cheek.

In truth, the harbormaster's seen the scuttled
ship. In shirtsleeves he tips the gig
to let the dog
in.

fish. fist. dish.

A fingerling flutters blind
in my hand, twitching time
to a school that angles
the crook at the inlet.

*A child's arm, not a branch,
points out stars. Dim constellations
squint through stacked atmospheres,
the words for sky forgotten.*

*What sinks isn't a boat, but beamier,
a creaking displacement.
There are poles in place of trees,
words where music should be--*

--and my ankles ringed
in salt, headdress blue
with crab carapaces,
my arms far off, the lost limbs
of a cracked statue,
found with 2 or 3 fingers
missing from the elegant hand that cups
the bent fish.

*Wrist; palm; fist.
Fountain; pool; dish.*

II. 1001 Beauty Secrets

Because life is short
We must remember to keep asking it the same question
Until the repeated question and the same silence become
 answer
In words broken open and pressed to the mouth
 --John Ashbery, *from* "The New Spirit"

1001 Beauty Secrets

1. Culling

My father came from Yonkers.
 My stepmom's from the rubber capital.
 Mother grew up half in Rockefeller Center,
 half out. I find all this reciprocal.

Call me Elizabeth

Cape Elizabeth

I inherited the estate,
 I know where everything belongs:
 Hierarchy of impedimenta: Money before
 Art, Art before
 Beauty, Beauty before
 Lunch.

What I'm most close to is rotting on a shelf:
 bindings shirked, aflap with loose
 pages, abandoned
 illustrations of peasants and queens,
 irrelevant and rank.

What I'm most close to swims away from me:

Boats' bodies caught blind in reefs

ribs in disarray

racks of bluefish battened to pots

hands cracked around a Becket bend

hold the shuddering cull to the gunwale
then free it

(always some shadow or other leaving its shadow

(no stanza break)

beneath the hull
or skirting the mooring line *just out of*
sight) I can barely see my inside
swims blue
the blue

of lips in an unheated pool or after a small sea tragedy.
 The inside is the color of things that don't concern me.

My halvesisters work in hospitals, staring down monitors;
 blips from the bodies of our people, and others.
 Big brother married in the Biggest Little City.
 The youngest dusts along the periphery.
 I spool my scull out over the flat water:
Feather and pull and feather

2. Namestakes

Twinned *r*'s of stocking feet quiet the dirt
drive raveling east.
Four feet of 2 rabbits arrange and erase
5 letters in the peat.

Leaves swirl the house, rooftop frosted
with the white breath of children and rabbits and one woman
locked in the stare of the porch light.
She wears a white smock same as anyone,
except for the knife drawer in her side.
Her written name shapes open bowls
and crook'd fingers.
A sawn burl drops two soft
syllables from knotted wood.

*

The arced stain, the child's arm arced back
to throw the half-full cup, sand
in the purple juice above her lip,
the soft *g* lost in spittle.
The child's arm is catapult, red liquid suspended
in the flung moment; one
round drop whips off to dot the *i*.

The double burr reddens pink fingers, flesh
to blood, these. Lowercase *e* in a shell-boned grip
around the cup, capitals from the opened palm and straight
flung fingers. White teeth color in the eye of a waxwing, wing
tracing a loop of afternoon far
too rote.

(stanza break)

*

Winging spells the ground and a swath
of marsh and a cove end
in momentary gauze, a torn net that spills loose fish
back to the surf where, schooled, their slick bodies slip
past meaning.

But the last letter, it browned the grasses,
blotted the bird's eye, escaped the bird's body.
The waxwing looks past us.

3. Drama

Two hands
cup their respective breasts.

A vision has preceded this action.
There has been a question.

Two hands hold more than they're made for.
Two hands note the capacity
of 2 breasts.

This drama occurs on schedule twice on a drafty stage.
The audience speaks partially in complete sentences,
as the theater expands,
this the dry lung of an elderly woman living
in a damp climate. Theatergoers spill in and out
the great doors where a vast odor precedes each
explanation. The 2nd show will be running late.

Two men
with ideas like 2 men
are certain that a study of the routine shifts
of hands will reveal what's behind
a cloud in a clouded azure eye, or a hollow
voice hammering in a crowded house.

Don't believe everything you fear.
Objects may be closer than they appear.

Two men
with eyes like 2 men

(no stanza break)

study the last woman onstage,
a woman who sees herself
as 2 women.
She is thinking. She is scripted
to think 2 thoughts
at once
and make them 1 thought of 2
breasts, 1
in each hand. She sighs,
drops her breasts and walks
offstage.

4. The Expectation of Stars

I have a calling, a shred of noise so simple
it throws an elegant shadow, a bright birch tree
against a brick wall.

I know everybody
wants the same things: tea bags that last
indefinitely, an extended vacation, unprotected
sex. One woman wants to be furious
the way a squall is furious, to pelt like rain.
What we don't want: a handgun
in every hand, a good look at a naked stranger.
The doctor says there's a shot for this;
we don't want that either.

Lather. Rinse. Repeat.
Keep away from flame or heat.

For centuries
people of leisure
studied the dark
center of the eye
for desire, the white
for disease.

Our sheets are full of feathers.
Nobody comes. Instead, we talk till frost
rises in steam 3 hours past dawn.

The woman you thought intellectual busies herself with UFOlogy,
keeps changing her hair, tires of what she can and cannot say.

(stanza break)

The things we seem to have seem to be the things we seem to want.

Nobody bawls the bold, bald bowl of want
at the blue backdrop of night pierced with stars,
with the expectation of stars.

Who was it
marked time
on a torso worn smooth
as a saddle?

When we walk we wear walking shoes.
When we read we read no nonsense.
When we listen we listen in postures of concern
as if these bodies exist for philanthropy and jogging.
Sex is incidental, a sneeze that breaks
tags from our own
clean shadows.

Words that can be said:
Raincoats. Incidents.
Ephedrine. Dentifrice.
Bless you.
Now go to bed.

5. Sleep Secrets

What falls,
 (Electromagnetic bulb of nothing?
 Metallic venus?)
 scars our cornfields, plants
 blue hashmarks on the bellies of the women.
 Epidermis regenerates

on our bellies and elsewhere.
 We scour our pillows for fallen hair.

Down here, broken down
 reference books splay on our chests--
 we sleep the sleep,
 --grown paler, the city
 pokes at the mottled air, toppling out
 by the railyard, cars strewn like spun bottles.

Things that happen at night can't be trusted
 to continue till morning. Then again, daytime
 is suspect; all those sharp edges,
 all that insistent light.

(Reapply every 4 hours.
 See the women wade deep in wildflowers.)

The farthest fences meet in white-angled messages. Who for?
 Messages slip through
 lighting loose rings
 of atmospheres
 where we teeter on the eve of a most bad dream.

(stanza break)

The dampened hand
of the designated explainer pockets
and unpockets a blood-warm meteorite, dropped
here to deliver a new idea of a new idea of a flower:

Here. This is for you.

(Sleepers rub their stomachs,
mouth native words in a foreign tongue.)

O yes, it's a calling, a piece of a ship
that shines like liquid spilled into a dim basin
of dim laughter.

Here is your satellite.

Here is your wingtip to the sky.

6. Red 40 Lake

Up is north.

See the stunted pyramid--

incidental canine, leftover of legend,

pre-us pre-everything we know?

Some sandy rock candy, hardly granite,

circled round

by ragtag beach circled round

by sky.

Night flattens the lake to mercury

stirred by the rolling dorsal

of the inedible, endangered *Cui-ui*.

A corridor of white

pelicans rafts the surface, web lingers

among fin, whipped confections

topping the bottomless broth

that reflects

once we erase skies, reissue the moon,

on images depend--just this: Heaven

will sleep in a candy dish,

ignorant fingers red sweet in ignorance

what we do tends to be what we did:

Err:

Heck:

many things are hard to accept:

what goes into this lake tends not to come out,

or rises months late in a cousin lake,

lips nibbled, hair splayed by drift, lifted

through fossiled atmospheres, a spent traveler breathing silt.

7. The Mathematics of Plumbing or A Sinking Ballerina

Sanitized for your protection.

The room looks out in 3 directions.

Back at the hotel the room repeats me,
 repeats the rows of rooms, ridiculous and ornate.
 (In plain language) he said, "I'm not coming."
tasteful reading lamp, tasteless alarm clock, house phone, seascape,
complimentary watermarked stationary, complimentary camisole
eaten through by mice, and condoms, expiration dates expired
 All these insist on an exact light,
 an existence.
 Which of me will say,
 "I'm not in," into the phone?
 I take a few pills, prop up my good legs.
 My pulse repeats my pulse and this agéd chateau
 repeats the pulses of spillage.

I have my proof: Rapid clack of heels suddenly hushed
 in impractical shag carpet and reduced to a hammering
 uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh
 in the body of the building.
 And that murmur? 107 bathtubs
 emptying, impossible (unless one sits entirely still)
 to hear.

This establishment is smoke-free.
 Don't forget to take your key.

I take nothing that does not ring. The room chimes
 orphaned *negligee*, neglected *insomnia*, *nightsweats*. Towels

(no stanza break)

hang on clear plastic rings.
 The valley air inverts,
 reversed so fast the hotel
 flops over:
 nights as warm as noon--

*(half-clothed, the tourists stroll and nod
 in the shimmer of the lake,
 grazing deer at no extra charge ;chipmunks curled up in shoes).*
 (I scan the perfect bodies
 for melodrama and melanoma.)

The birds and I pick at the dregs of the buffet. I regret leaving
 my wardrobe strewn artistically across the Nevada hardpan
 to flap wild, dancers winged by buckshot in the grit and wind.

In a dry climate, plumbing is the primary obsession
 (best obsessed over undressed)
 where every basin is upended.

Calculated, check out time is a mathematics of drainage:
 Leakage is a long goodbye or a speedy unlacing:
 Hose washer (x) + cracked elbow (y) = the 3rd floor
 balcony railing (z) giving under the weight
 of spoken codes, rubber plugs and unsolicited phone sex.

Poised clones repeat from the slider, the recliner,
 the air conditioner, the bath and seascape
 as I swing my good legs out toward the pool.

"No," he said.

III. Misshapen Identities

From the outset it was apparent that someone had played a colossal trick on something.

--John Ashbery, from "The System"

Action Figure

Hold me up to the light
and you'll hear things. Like,
"Look, a born pole vaulter."
Or, "I can see you're
not feeling well." I'm not
a born anything.
Not even a liar.
I use a lot of paste.
This smile, for instance, came from a fashion magazine.
These hands were borrowed from an aunt who keeps
calling. Some things

I found in the street:
lumps of coal for each breast,
a blown glass heart, bright green,
the gravel for the knees.
They make a noise that fills
a box tucked up on
the shelf of my womb.

My nerves are fiberglass cabled at the spine. I don't feel
the 5 lb. weights land on my spare toe. Gym shorts stay
plastered on for keeps--
--until I come apart
in warm water.
I glue crisp hairs
to my legs
and to a spot
where the wood
of my head
shows through.

The Broken Aquarium

They have nothing in common with their friends.
 They model nude but will not read aloud.
 They begin to see patterns in the tarmac.
 They are made invisible out of habit.

They are no different from you or me.
 They leave nothing to chance. They know exactly when
 they will die, having lost the house in a card game.

They ask, "Is it art?" and answer by throwing coins.
 They use these words so often all meaning is lost.
 They have fantasies that preclude celibacy.
 They rub their heels raw on the fresh linen sheets.

They are tired. The straight razor is all
 they think about since the broken aquarium.
 They say, "the last thing we need is an oasis."

They become aroused by the slightest vibration.
 They have morals. Even when
 they part their lips no one will seduce them.

They disrupt the landscape with coffee.
 They envy their own corpulent figures.
 They dismantle every building where
 they remember having the best sex.

They have better things to do than build airstrips:
 they wander rainforests in their sleep,
 they wear hairshirts to the office on Fridays,

(no stanza break)

they pound the blacksmith into a useful shape.

They will tell you they never saw it coming. And yet,
they stockpiled condoms and size D batteries. Once
they laughed at lepers, but not anymore.

They have nothing in common with their friends.
They model nude but will not read aloud.
They begin to see patterns in the tarmac.
They are made invisible out of habit.

Post-romantic Stress Syndrome

1.

It is written: to kiss a mannequin
is a sin. Voted in by consensus
the prophets are powerless
to change this. And consensual sex?
They must know it
is the stone in my shoe that was,
at first, painful.
I walk beside the wheel.

1.

As the wet prophet spins
the hem of his robe spirals
a spray of water over
my pale exterior.
I count the lines
of woodgrain in the parquet.
Upright I am a spoke.
Today I am a tread.

1.

Speaking of romance,
the yellow prophet approaches
every oasis
with a reworked set of phrases.
My caress will disappear exactly as he expects
a ship to retreat
over the horizon
in the bright swerve of afternoon.

(stanza break)

1.

The swallowing of stones increases
my personal gravity, the earth's
persistence. I squat
for the tattered one who says
I must pass a stone in accord
with each seizure
of mad love. He busies himself
building a wooden hut.

1.

The blue prophet is insistent.
He seeds the circles, hides devices
among the cacti. Last night
when he reset the dials
my voice registered
at 9. This time he does not look
up. I straddle my empty
applecart and wait.

1.

The dry prophet takes a drink.
In his hands my teeth yellow
like canned corn. We are in the 2nd
year of a 7 year drought. Therefore, he covets
my beaded chain, hands me a pair
of green dice. I roll sixes
and sixes. In the cornfield
the blade stops against a rock.

1.

The radio crackles with showtunes

(no stanza break)

from a tower in Sparks. The leather
prophet taps out a sum
equal to a hoofbeat. I concede
to his offers of condoms, pickling
salts and cayenne.
I sit tall in the saddle
for my shots.

1.

Flung on the sand their oily soup
takes the shape of a continent.
I dig in Africa, emerge outside
this room. I extract
a flawed handtool, a hand made
of granite, a handbook
on the rhetoric of sex, its pages
almost ash.

At Gunpoint

She puts her makeup on at gunpoint,
does whatever the cat burglar asks.
They have an understanding.
She buys the bullets, he worships her.

She wears a hat made of concrete.
Her neck grows stronger every day.
The pick-lock waves his pistol
and blows holes through the dressing table.
She smiles

a smile that cracks the sludge on her left eye
and makes static on the radio downstairs.
Her houseplants will die
if this keeps up. It's all she can do
to wear that hat,

to hold her head still while the thief tosses
grapes through a gap in her teeth. His aim
is always a little off.
She doesn't blame him. She can't.

He's a good guy
really, despite a penchant for migrant work
and a rash that just won't heal. For a dollar
she can forgive. For a dollar
she will spin
in her chamber.

Lover

For you, fingernails
and a prominent mole
on this side of my neck

or that

that tends to leave
a track like a snail's,
sticky, luminous, and alkaline.

IV. Anonymous Correspondences

Relocation

The memory of the Beach Club is accurate
 as a paper cut; it stings of metallised salt, not quite the ocean.
 Skuas, in the shadow of grey matter, flirt
 with the temporal bones of a mackerel skull.
 A temperate climate, at least, balanced
 between what floats and what won't.
 We stand firm in the undertow, smashing
 souvenirs with dropped objects,
 our most solid possessions. We repeat until

*Once, perhaps we assembled explosives in a remote cabin.
 Maybe we were seen running from a twisted commuter rail.
 We'd clock passersby for a drug that did not last the night.
 You have heard of us?*

we can continue, which we do.
 We sail west out of Necessity, until the terrain rises, a swell
 frozen in an old ocean, completely out of water.
 We take the indigenous birds for nesters,

*Once, perhaps, we sold secrets to warm enemies.
 Maybe we saw a child-pilot taken down by wind shear in Wyoming.
 We lost ourselves at home, hushed in a satellite dish.
 Have you seen us?*

dull eyes and big sticks and loopy flight. Smoke
 blows in code at dusk. "Fellow rafters," we say, and answer
 with the last of our flares. Melting snowpack levels the valley
 in a metallic water upon which we float anew,
 bumping stripped limbs,

(stanza break)

*We found ourselves in the labyrinth of a Thai restaurant.
Maybe we had a way of speaking, a technique, but that's over.
Once, perhaps, there was a way to go home.
Who was that on the phone?*

fat birds, the remains of a town's possessions.
The climate supports more than motorized traffic.
Pedalling is still a crime,
the law unenforceable. We are a culture now,
of proud and shapely legs. Lower body strength
is the popular social configuration.
Therefore, women find themselves rising
like cream. It is good to be here.

Reno to Wendover

I am in a motel room in Reno.
I am taking it apart.
I have some tools but the motel is very sticky.
Plaster drops from the ceiling in wet clumps.
Outside the Truckee River is dried up.
I build a bridge next to it out of old plaster
and pieces of the motel.
From the top span I can see the curve of the earth
and on it a town made of yellowed newspapers.
Along the highway messages are written with stones.
A watertower retreats across the horizon.
Not even the rev of the motorcycle changes.
The casino is full of children,
shoulders bent to slot machines that pay
in marbles. Blackjack tables are abandoned,
the giftshop emptied of bibles and brothel guides.
In the chapel the last couple drowns in rice.
It spills out the door and sticks to my shoes.
On the salt flats I tip over.
The motorcycle spins on the throttle and pegs,
digs a hole and runs out of gas.
My new claim yields marbles, a rosary and rice.
I wear a damp towel and display my hands.

Two

They promise to drive us. A truckload
of moss staring straight up. Two loaves
of French bread in 1 overcoat.

They promise. A crooked
constellation. A pair of sequined
child's shoes.

They promise to drive a thin
2-lane straightening the desert
to the clean coast of California.

It's a good time to go. Before the fringe
shows up with its valid complaints.
Before the rain soaks us through. Before our parents
forget their nakedness, crouch
on the grass or squat
in a spattered nest.

They promise to deliver us.
A wet shoebox tied up in string.
Dark couplets spat from the bridge.
They promise to deliver us.
A drain clogged with 2 rinds of fruit.
A beaker half full of semen.
The catamaran wedged in the waterway
at the scoured brink of the sea.

The Anonymous Correspondences

Postcard #1

My dear (blank),

I have covered the floor with dead leaves and await your arrival. Please bring the wrenches and a mobile of rodent bones spraypainted blue. I have left a tome of random equations at the base of a red oak. Daily I note the veer of winds by the progression of page numbers. My conversations with the piebush have, at last, reached an impasse, neither of us having truly rebounded from a spat regarding hatpins and hipboots. However, the hydrangea appears to be coming around to my way of thinking, politically and otherwise, and has changed its petals to violet according to the acidity of your correspondence. I have carved your name in limestone and set it into the base of the tomb. When it rains, I sharpen the chisel and the tines of my new rake. I love you and dream of red lines across your back. The airplane engine sputters. I must go. If I recognize your truck on the interstate I'll tip a wing and spill green marbles.

Until then, look up. Your (blank)

Postcard #2

Sweet (blank),

I am still carving the pumpkin. The gardener keeps asking for the snips. Do I tell him? I've put your hounds on salary. Now they don't come around except to dig up tea bags or lap standing water from under the oleander. Sundays, they roam in a pack that overturns trashcans and trees the postman. When he comes down, I will mail you some cookie-cutter mud from my boots. Until then, sleep with a light on. I haven't seen those dogs in days.

Your true (blank)

Postcard #3

(blank)Chou ,

Tubers continue to grow from the newspapers. I read, in spite of everything. Between vines grows the rest of the room. *Le mur est grand, mais ce n'est pas long*. Did you read of the releases? Seven swans in 7 colors. Most have since plummeted to the earth. The blue 1 landed on a small boy riding a waterbike in Rengala. The swan is recovering, though it seems the boy suffered some permanent damage. The orange swan was spotted, just yesterday, over Ovinsek, but the authorities refuse to confirm. As for the others still aloft, only reports of the green 1 seem plausible. A woman in Burnin claims to have fed it overcooked rice and fastened a mauve tube sock around its neck before pointing it south. Several people claim to have shot at it since then. I am only a correspondent. To whom shall I report? For now, I weed through the newspapers. It is rumored the tubers are excellent in salad.

Avec amour (blank)

Postcard #4

My precious (blank),

Your record jackets flutter around the apartment, strike the picture window and fall to the carpet. I left a dead pigeon on top of the carport until its silvered down blew away revealing a notched spine. Beyond the temporary orange fencing the city is a moan. Rain falls on it and elsewhere. A carelessly lit backdrop recedes; the reflection makes it more of a city than it is. I study the double doors for clues, a code of small bones. The backs of my hands are a crisp paper and thin at the joints. Crows gather in low trees to wait out the squall while I scan for lightening strikes, my face pressed to the glass. With love, (blank)

Postcard #5

My dear (blank),

Springtime refuses to appear though I build mosaics and monuments to its caprice. Springtime does not get the joke. When I am sober it mocks me with snow-dusted dandelions. The chill in here is magnificent, sweaters long since gone off to the dry cleaners. Someone in the building keeps poaching eggs as if to insist that winter is the correct season. There is nothing left to do but fill the den with beach sand and send out for mint juleps. My broken glass collection and box of small stones is almost depleted. If the weather doesn't break soon I'll be forced to add irregular bolts and twisted nails to the new monument. It looks surprisingly like you, and a bit like me. If you could see your way here, springtime might find us amusing. I do. In fact, the thought of your weedy hair makes me laugh out loud. I will save a few shards for you to arrange with a snowflake in a jar.

Your Weathervane, (blank)

Postcard#6

Dear (blank),

I ventured into the haunted dwelling and the hand you spoke of was there, coiled neglectedly on the sill of the third floor window facing away from the widow's walk. This hand is attached to a woman (whom you failed to mention) whose roiling gowns reflect the thin gray of the rotten walls and the sky. Her hair and eyes have faded to the same untidy gray. This hand opened absently at my approach and out of it rose an angry wasp which drove itself once against the glass. Three fishscales fell to the boards in no discernable pattern. All the while another hand was drawn to her throat in a fist like a brooch. The mention of your name started her talking and she will not stop.

Cross your fingers, (blank)

Postcard #7

Dearest (blank),

At last they loosen the ropes. I've found, by speaking in my native tongue, I make them laugh because of my laughter. I do not tell them the same stories I tell you, but sometimes I must wear the hat and shoes. They love a little something to remove. Most days, I sew heavy buttons onto trenchcoats which remind me of you. Out in the fenced yard, I used to wear pink to attract bees. I keep them in jelly jars around the edge of my cell. The whiteness of their buzzing lulls me to sleep like that river in Idaho. One of the guards has a voice pitched like yours but knows nothing of jazz. I pretend that he is kind. I miss you like water, (blank)

epilogue

Better to get drunk and cry than show off your learning in public.
--Otomo No Tabito

Task

Who was it aflap beside me,
keeping up,
tin birdcall in a boxcar?
Every word grinds
into another tongue.
What colors us
that we color the blue sky
true blue?

In my book,
isn't everyone clothed
(even-tempered, even children, on tiptoe
beside the tracks) where
the pages stick together, where
a crafted climax reads
like the wind pulling hats
from the heads of bystanders?